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# Watersheds

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Water Protection Program fact sheet

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## What is a watershed?

A watershed is a land region that drains into a single river or other body of water. A group of watersheds that drain into a major water body is often referred to as a basin. For instance, all of the land that drains into the Missouri River from Three Forks, Montana, to St. Louis, Missouri, is referred to as the Missouri River Basin. Watersheds can be divided into smaller watersheds such as an area surrounding a small creek or stream.

## What is an example of watershed?

The East Fork of Shoal Creek, and the land that drains into it is referred to as the East Fork Shoal Creek Watershed. Located in Kansas City's Northland between the urban centers of Liberty and Gladstone, the watershed covers approximately 14 square miles including Hodge Park. The East Fork of Shoal Creek runs through Hodge Park, draining to the South and flows into Shoal Creek which eventually empties into the Missouri River.

## Why is my watershed important?

Watersheds provide water for drinking, irrigation and industrial processes. Many people also enjoy and use lakes and streams for their beauty, boating, fishing and swimming. Wildlife also need healthy watersheds for food and shelter.

## What are some concerns about my watershed?

Water quality is a major concern in a watershed. Water quality problems can result from a wide variety of activities. Pollution can occur from factories, wastewater treatment plants or large confined animal feeding operations that discharge into a waterway. These types of point source pollutants are often traced back to a specific point of discharge. Nonpoint source pollution, however, is a major type of pollution that can be difficult to identify and measure. Nonpoint source pollutants are in the water that runs off crop or forest land. Other nonpoint sources include failing septic systems, parking lots, construction sites, irrigation systems and drainage systems. It can even result from automobile exhaust getting into the atmosphere and falling back to earth in the rain.

## Who is responsible for my watershed?

Point sources are regulated under the Clean Water Act and are usually subject to permit requirements that focus on water quality protection. Nonpoint source pollution typically is

unregulated and can be addressed by citizens, farmers and educators on a volunteer basis. The responsible parties may include citizens, industries, agribusinesses, commercial businesses or homeowners.



## **How can I protect my watershed?**

Get to know your watershed. By becoming familiar with the activities in your watershed, you can better understand pollution problems that need specific attention. Attend public meetings or hearings to address pollution problems. In the planning process, public participation by informed citizens fosters quality development with minimal impact to water quality. Implement best management practices where possible. Join a volunteer water quality monitoring team.

As a resident, limit your use of lawn fertilizers and pesticides or investigate alternatives. In the garden or landscaped areas, cover exposed soil with mulch or hay to prevent soil erosion. Do soil testing and pest scouting so that fertilizers and pesticide applications can be more accurately applied. Keep your automobile maintained to reduce the amount of oil, grease and other lubricants leaking onto roads and driveways. Dispose of used oil and household chemicals properly.

If you live on a farm, maintain filter strips on the edges of your fields, terrace your row crops and mix your chemicals away from the well. Ask your county extension agent about rotational grazing, a practice that prevents erosion and unnecessary reseeding, provides cleaner water for livestock and protects nearby streams and creeks.

## **For More Information**

For more information on volunteer monitoring, watersheds or nonpoint source pollution contact

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